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ABSTRACT

At the University of Nevada, Reno, lectureships developed out of a serious problem of staffing freshman composition. Almost all students take two semesters of freshman English, and in the late 1970's, when the ability to staff these courses became severely limited, the new freshman sections were staffed by temporary faculty identified as lecturers. During the early 80's lecturers taught only composition and occupied temporary low-paying positions. In the mid 1980's the lectureships were moved into the regular university budget. The people occupying these positions, as opposed to earlier versions, were selected in a national search. Lecturers were hired for a 3 year probationary period and if they were judged to be excellent in teaching and otherwise satisfactory, they were offered revolving 3-year contracts as a substitution for tenure. Since 1986 a number of changes have redefined the positions. Salaries were increased and lecturers were allowed to teach one literature course per semester. Recent schedule changes have produced a very different kind of position from the one first created. Today lecturers have become the most flexible participants in the overall schedule, teaching in a variety of programs: freshman composition, technical writing, the Honors program, the PACE program, and all levels of the English literature program except graduate courses. In the future, lecturers will remain crucial to administering as well as teaching the composition program and will remain only slightly less crucial to the other programs cited above. (NH)

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Lectureships at the University of Nevada, Reno

I have been asked to provide a brief history of Nevada's lectureships, and I'm happy to do so. Some years ago my colleague Ann Ronald wrote about our positions in ADE, but I think my version of the relevant events will provide a second firsthand account of the early period and a first summary of what has taken place in the last five years or so. I write as a department member throughout the relevant period (1979-1993), as a member of the department's Personnel Committee for all but three years of this period, and as the department's chairman from 1980 to 1982 and from 1988 to the present.

Our lectureships developed out of the very serious problems almost everyone has recently faced in staffing freshman composition. Almost all our students take two semesters of freshman English, and in the late 1970s our ability to staff these courses was severely limited. At that time we had a small graduate program and no more than fifteen teaching fellowships. Many sections of freshman English were taught by tenure-track faculty (who did at least one course a year) and letters of appointment, or adjunct faculty. When university enrollments began to rise abruptly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the administration accepted

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the argument that the new freshman sections could only be staffed by temporary faculty who would teach more courses than were being done by letters of appointment (who by definition taught only one or two sections a semester). The people hired to do this were assigned three or four classes a semester, and in our system this identified them as lecturers.

During the early 1980s the number of lectureships varied from seven to nine. The positions were always recreated each year, but their status was a perennial problem. As the positions were not yet permanent or continuing, they had to be reconstituted (and refunded) from year to year, with a new search for each new arrangement. I think we did five searches, all local in nature, between 1980 and 1985. Throughout this period the people in these positions taught exclusively in the composition program. Some of the people involved taught throughout this period, though we replaced at least one person every time we were forced to do another search for a slightly redefined set of positions. Salaries at this time were very low, only somewhat higher than the per course compensation for letters of appointment. Our lecturers taught only composition and occupied low-paying positions which were temporary in nature. Since 1985 a number of things have been done to address the obvious problems here.

Several years earlier, in 1982, I had proposed to the administration that it agree to fund what turned out to be eight lectureships if we agreed to staff all freshman courses with the resulting personnel. When the administration agreed to this proposal, it effectively committed itself to funding these positions permanently. In the mid 1980s it did the next logical

thing, which was to move the eight lectureships into the regular university budget and into the FTE "lines" of the College of Arts and Science. At this point, the English department expanded by eight positions in one year. The people occupying these positions, as opposed to earlier versions, had been selected in a national search. (At this time several people from outside the area were added, though at least three of the positions were still held by people who had been with us from the first.) When the positions were added to the college, they were also officially absorbed into the department. The tenure-track faculty decided to extend the vote to lecturers even though they were to be on multiyear contracts rather than tenured, and lecturers were quickly granted all other departmental rights (including such dubious rights as serving on departmental, college, and university committees, and more attractive rights such as sabbaticals and development leaves--our lecturers have in fact come to chair university committees and take sabbatical leave time like other faculty). We decided to hire lecturers for a three-year probationary period (now six years), then, if they were judged to be excellent in teaching and otherwise satisfactory, to offer them revolving three-year contracts (a three-year contract renewed each year). This device was intended as a substitution for tenure, and it remains the department's intention to continue indefinitely any lecturer who survives the probationary review. So far no lecturer has been discontinued, though one contract was withheld for one year before being renewed as a three-year arrangement.

The resulting positions were (and are) primarily teaching

positions. Lecturers taught four courses a semester and did the usual service contributions, but they were not required to publish. Eventually they were asked to provide annual evidence of what was called professional development, as reflected in everything from professional conferences to publication itself. They were included in the university's merit pool, though it was decided that they should constitute their own "pool" and be compared with each other rather than with tenure-track faculty. (As of this year, I might add, lecturers and tenure-track faculty will be together in one merit pool.) From about 1984, then, they have participated in virtually all departmental functions.

Since 1986 a number of changes have significantly redefined the positions. About this time lecturer salaries were judged to be substantially lower than those for lecturers elsewhere in the university, and these salaries were boosted quite a bit. The same judgment was made a year ago, and salaries have again been increased (though the process has been delayed this very year). Today we would hire a new lecturer at about \$26,000, about \$5,000 less than for a new tenure-track person. Then as now, the Ph.D. is not required (though three of our lecturers do have the Ph.D., and one has an MFA). The teaching schedule is very different today. During the 1980s we decided to allow all lecturers to teach one literature course per semester, so as to provide some diversity in their schedules. Almost all the literature courses were at the sophomore level, though as needed lecturers with the Ph.D. were used in more advanced courses. Over time, however, as the English program grew (more than doubling in majors and minors in the 1980s) and no new tenure-track faculty were added, we came

to ask lecturers to teach more and more literature sections in order to maintain something like the number of courses and sections we wanted to offer at the various levels. This process has continued to the point that our lecturers now teach sophomore-level literature courses more often than they teach composition. They now teach three rather than four courses a semester, but are asked to do a serious, year-long service obligation to the department or university in lieu of a fourth course each semester (examples include managing a university program for freshmen, serving as consultants in our Writing Center, and coordinating one of our three freshman-level composition courses). They are still not required to publish, but we do recognize such works in our merit reviews.

Recent changes in our schedule have indeed produced a very different kind of position from the one we first created. As recently as 1991, when I wrote a piece subsequently published in the May 1992 issue of CCC, I described a program in which lecturers taught as many as forty composition sections a year. Today, if everyone were available, lecturers would be assigned about twelve sections of freshman composition. This change has resulted from the needs in our literature and language programs, but also the growth of our graduate program; today we have thirty-five teaching fellowships, and so our lecturers can be used elsewhere as needed. Indeed, they have become the most flexible participants in our overall schedule, teaching in a variety of programs: freshman composition, technical writing, the Honors program, the PACE program, and all levels of the English literature program except graduate courses. None of our current lecturers

was hired for his or her literary credentials, but all have more than sufficient literary training to teach somewhere in our diverse schedule. All have been retained as excellent teachers, and my experience has been that this teaching ability definitely travels, so to speak, as lecturers move from freshman courses to, say, our sophomore requirements for English majors. We continue to depend heavily on our lecturers in the area of composition, however, for in addition to the sections they still teach they serve as consultants and coordinators in our Writing Center and our several freshman courses.

In my CCC piece I extolled a lectureship system as the best way to handle an expanding freshman composition program. It's somewhat ironic, then, that I now find myself describing and defending a system in which our lecturers teach far less composition than they used to teach. Ideally, our lecturers would be handling a higher percentage of our writing classes, for they provide the best instruction we are able to offer at that level. In practice, however, the current arrangement is a very good one, as the lecturers both fill in the gaps elsewhere in our program and serve as mentors to our teaching fellows. As a chairman I have found it remarkably useful--perhaps indispensable--to be able to count on a cadre of excellent teachers who do at least three courses a semester for us and teach effectively at various points throughout our schedule. In a program like ours there is probably no set number of lecturers needed (we currently have nine); but I am convinced there will always be a need for many of these people, serving as needed to allow us to offer a program in which (so far) we have not had to resort to

large lecture sections or to curtail offerings simply because we could not find qualified instructors. I expect our lecturers will remain crucial to administering as well as teaching the composition program and will remain only slightly less crucial to the other programs cited above.